

HUMAN SUFFERING
AND
HEAVENLY SYMPATHY:
3

A Sermon

PREACHED AT THE CATHEDRAL, MONTREAL,
FEBRUARY 15, 1852.

BY

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COUNCIL OF CANADA.

“RECTE FACIENDO SECURUS.”

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MONTREAL, 2nd March, 1852.

To the REV. W. A. ADAMSON, D. C. L., &c. &c.

REVEREND SIR.—We the undersigned members of the congregation of Christ Church Cathedral, listened with much pleasure and edification to a Sermon lately preached by you on the duty incumbent on all men of making provision for their families, by means of Life Assurance; and were much struck with the forcible and lucid manner in which that obligation was enforced on the occasion alluded to.

We are also of opinion that much good might be effected by the publication of that excellent discourse, and therefore respectfully pray that you will favour us with the manuscript, that we may cause it to be circulated where it cannot but produce beneficial effects.

Yours most faithfully,

J. McCORD.

J. O. MOFFATT.

JOHN DYDE.

W. BADGLEY.

J. J. C. ABBOTT.

H. J. O. ANDREWS.

ST. ANTOINE STREET, 6th March, 1852.

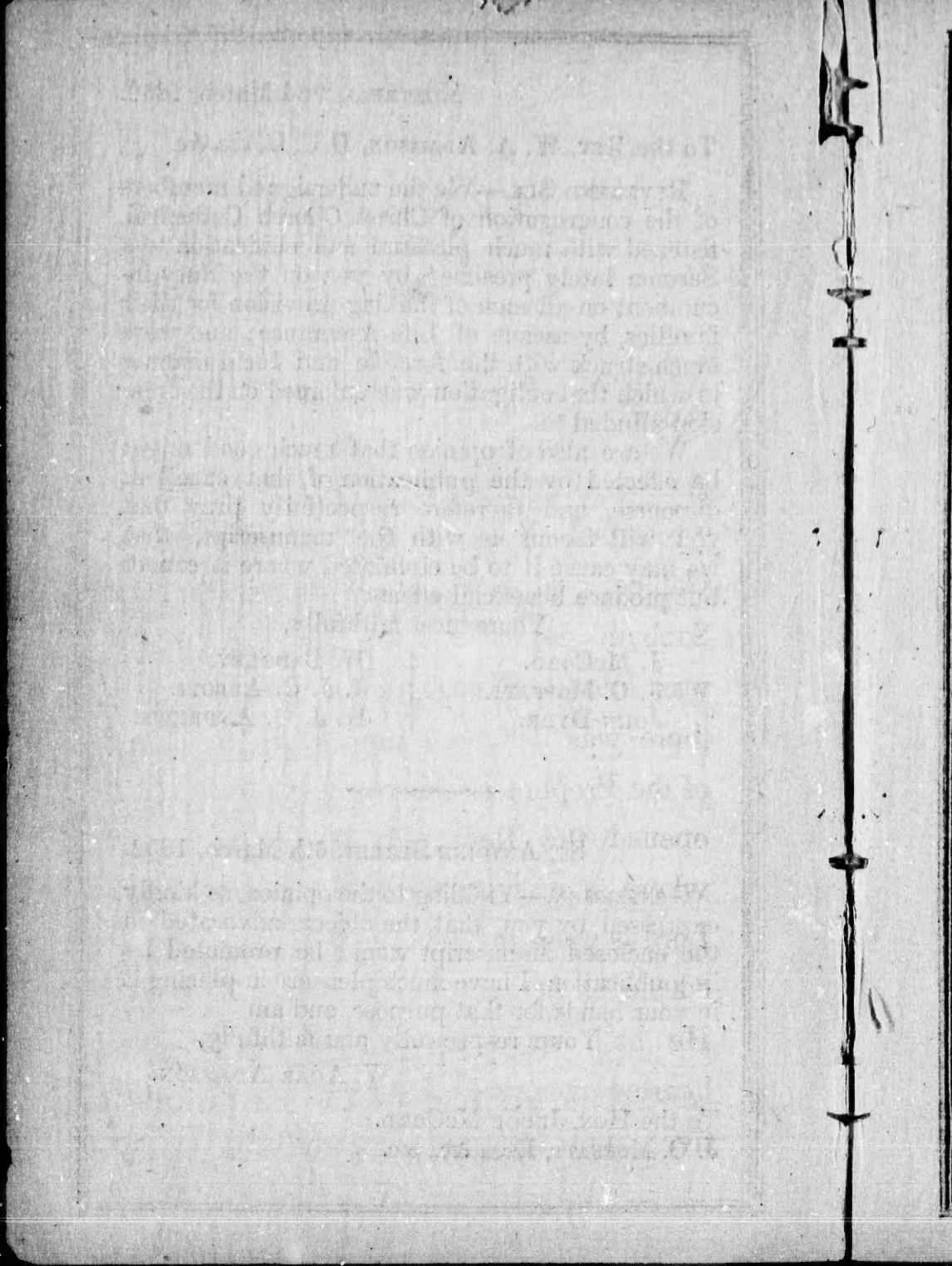
GENTLEMEN,—Yielding to the opinion, so kindly expressed by you, that the objects advocated in the enclosed Manuscript would be promoted by its publication, I have much pleasure in placing it in your hands for that purpose, and am

Yours respectfully and faithfully,

W. AGAR ADAMSON.

To the HON. JUDGE MCCORD.

J. O. MOFFATT, Esq., &c., &c.



S E R M O N.

“The only son of his mother, and she was a widow.”—*Luke vii. 12.*

AFTER His temptation, our blessed Saviour “returned in the power of the spirit to Galilee, and being at Nazareth on the Sabbath day, He went, as His custom was, into the Synagogue for to read. And there was delivered unto Him the Book of the Prophet Esaias ; and when He had opened the Book, He found the place where it was written : The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted ; to preach deliverance to the captives, and the recovery of sight to the

blind ; to set at liberty them that are bruised ; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

The Holy Jesus “came to his own, but His own received Him not ;” and so leaving Nazareth, the place “where He had been brought up,” He came to Caper-naum, where the people were no less astonished at His doctrine than amazed at His deeds.

“What a word is this,” said they among themselves ; “with what authority and power He commandeth the unclean Spirits, and they come out.”

Continuing His journey, we may, in spirit, linger for a while beside the Lake of Gennesaret, and there listen to His holy lessons, or, with St. Simon, “launch out into the deep,” and share that disciple’s fears as the miraculous draught of

fishes threatened to sink his frail boat. Thence, again, we may accompany our Lord in His pilgrimage of charity, noting, as we pass, the memorials of His tenderness, when the leper was cleansed, the palsied healed, the paralytic restored, when mourning hearts were made happy as the “bright beams” of His compassion were softly shed upon them.

Arriving at that “second Sabbath after the first,” may we not, with the great multitude of people “out of Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon,” take our “place on the plain,” lifting to Heaven the secret prayer, that the supreme Author of the Christian faith would “incline our hearts to keep His Law?”

Can we, my brethren, stand beside those early called disciples, and as their divine

Master "lifted up His eyes upon them," feel that we are the inheritors of their joy? Can we apply to our own hearts the warm words of affection that fell upon their ears: "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of Heaven?" Can we follow the discourse of the Redeemer without a sigh at our own proud hearts, so alien to the grace of charity, so unlike the meekness that dwelt in the breast of Jesus? Can we listen without a pang to the searching interrogatories of our Lord? Do we love our enemies, and do good to them who hate us? Do we bless them that curse us, and pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us? Are we merciful and forgiving, not alone for our own sakes, but from a regard to Him who is kind unto the unthankful and the evil?

The Holy Jesus did not only exhort us

to well doing,—did not only give us with His lips the epitome of the Christian Law, but He also illustrated in his life the manner in which that Law should be applied ; thus enforcing by example, as well as by precept, the divine rule of conduct, that each one of us should, according to his means and opportunity, strive to attain to a high standard of virtue and goodness ; that each of us should, according to his station and ability, do his utmost to assuage human suffering and to lighten human care ; that in every way, by counsel and by sacrifice, we should endeavour to succour, help and comfort, all that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation.

The power of the Saviour being almighty, it was oftentimes manifested in acts which the Deity alone could achieve ; but then it was also adorned by words—kind

words, my brethren, which the humblest among us can bestow, and the highest appreciate. Whether we consider the case of the Centurion, whose faithful servant was "sick and ready to die," or the circumstances of the Widow of Nain, whose only son was dead and about to be buried, we find the Saviour's compassion as conspicuous in His words of tenderness as in His acts of power—in His regard for the temporal trials of His brethren, as in His concern for their everlasting happiness; for, while we may observe that the Centurion's servant was restored to health in reward for the faith of his master, so also we cannot fail to notice that the son of the Widow, was raised to life again in virtue only of the sorrows of his mother. Of a truth was it said, that He who was "anointed to preach the gospel to the

poor," was sent also to "heal the broken-hearted."

" And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain, and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people. Now, when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow : and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, weep not. And He came and touched the bier, and they that bare him stood still. And he said, young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother."

How affecting are human wretchedness and divine benignity when brought into contrast! Still, let us remember that the

affliction which called forth the compassion of Jesus is met with in every city, in every parish, and in every street. Nain is not the only place where may be found the widowed wife and the childless mother—where the train of mourners may be met by the children of song—where the mortal remains of a perished affection may be passed by the unthinking companies of youth and joy.

This funeral has become memorable, not because the solitary mourner had to undergo a sorer trial than many bereaved ones before and since her day, but because it was met by Him who is the “resurrection and the life,” even “God manifest in the flesh.”

It served not only to attest His divine power, but to exemplify the consonance between human suffering and heavenly sympathy. It served, moreover, to shew,

that while the mission of the Saviour had not for its declared object to rescue us from pain, sickness, poverty, disappointment, or distress, still that it was agreeable to the heavenly character of the Redeemer's advent,—to the salvation of souls, which was its object,—that He should condescend to our weak estate, and pour the oil of wine and gladness upon the bruised and broken hearts of men—that while He forgave all our iniquities, He could also heal all our diseases—could “call forth our life from destruction,” and “cover us with loving-kindness and tender mercies.”

It should, therefore, be always borne in mind, that while Christ our Lord is indeed the atoning sacrifice, the “one offering for sin and uncleanness,” He is also the “example of godly life.” Not only is He the great object of present faith and future bliss,

but the great pattern for personal imitation and immediate study.

It is true, my brethren, we cannot heal the corrosions of disease by a touch, nor awake from death the silent heart by a word ; but we may, in view of His mercy, who " shall wipe all tears from every eye," say to the sorrowing Christian, " Weep not." We may, in view of His promise, who has " opened the kingdom of Heaven to all believers," direct the mourner's gaze from the small mound which marks the lost one's grave, along the glory bow of hope that based in human dust, stretches to immortality and is lost in Heaven. We may speak of the coming end of time, when there shall be no more death, when the " corruptible shall put on incorruption," and the spirit of the bereaved be evermore united to the soul of the departed in love

and joy extatical. We should not, however, satisfy ourselves by suggesting subjects of spiritual solace only. It happens —how frequently, many of you know, and the clergy of your Church can but too well testify—that the mourner, having witnessed the conflict with death, and “buried the dead out of sight,” has immediately to engage in an unequal struggle for the battle of life, for the very means of subsistence; and it is, therefore, with a view to alleviate the earthly bitterness of an earthly loss, that I desire to offer some suggestions of counsel and forethought, which may seem, if not “to bind up the broken heart” of the bereaved, at least to furnish necessities to supply their temporal wants, and to spare them the pain, the bitter pain, of deriving a precarious and uncertain support from the grudging hand of charity.

It will require no effort of imagination to suppose that the case of the Widow of Nain may include these features of general suffering which but too frequently attend bereavement.

The fond husband, the loving parent, has been removed by death, and she who was a wife but yesterday, has now to mourn the loss of him in whom the love of her youth was treasured—of him who was the stay of her weakness and the support of her strength—in whose heart her own griefs were hushed, her joys heightened, her counsellor, her companion, her protector, the object of her purest affection, the father of her children.

Widowed, solitary, and heartstricken, she has to wrestle with the rough world for bread, for bread wherewith to support those dear pledges which her husband has be-

queathed to her care—too often his only bequest.

My friends, is not such a spectacle an object of sufficient power to move the Christian man to think—the Christian minister to counsel and advise ?

The storehouse of personal experience will supply abundant illustrations consequent on bereavement, of the sudden transition from affluence to destitution, from competence to penury, from decent respectability to abject poverty ; and these reverses, be it remembered, are not so much the result of crime, dissipation, or wastefulness, as they are of thoughtlessness, procrastination, and neglect.

Every husband and every parent is impressed with the paramount duty of making some provision for his wife and children in case of his decease ; but the natural love of

life, and the hope of enjoying many days—bright, blissful hope—borrowing its hues of the enchanting future from the fascinating present, precludes thought of the morrow, and defers, until death makes the duty impossible, taking measures for sheltering the dearest objects of mortal affection from the wounds and buffettings of a cold, unpitying world.

Some, from the lack of natural affection, or from inherent selfishness, will make no present sacrifice for the future good of those for whom they affect to cherish a pure, but, alas ! it too often proves, a counterfeit affection ; they will eat, drink, and indulge in the superfluities of life, pampering their appetites, feeding their foibles, inventing variety for personal enjoyment, and are willing to consign their families to the care of the charitable ; soothing their consciences,

it may be, with the hope that something may turn up for their benefit, of which, however, they are constrained to confess they have no present knowledge, no well-grounded expectation.

Some, too, from the very love of money, the greed of gain, lay out their plans for a long life of accumulation, and at the end descry a pyramid of fancied gold wherewith to enrich their descendants ; but the “canker-worm and the palmer-worm,” God’s great army, visit them, causing their “garments to be moth-eaten,” and their “gold to become dross ;” or, peradventure, the summons, as of old, is heard at a moment when they look not for it : “ This night shall thy soul be required of thee ;” and he dies, leaving but the rust of the miser’s heap to adorn his memory, and to maintain his heirs.

Not, however, to multiply the causes from which the same sad effects may flow, I venture now to suggest some considerations which have occurred to my own mind as being worthy of the most attentive regard.

There are, I have no doubt, many who may think that this is neither the place nor the occasion for treating of the subject which I propose to bring before you ; but to all such objectors I may be permitted to remark, that it does appear to me to be the peculiar province of the clergy, not only and primarily to attend to the spiritual interests of their flocks, but also to take notice of the various plans, contrivances, and associations, which, in these days of prolific invention, are presented to the sympathies and suffrages of men, and if they can discover, amid a mass of imposition

and imposture, that there are some one or more of these associations whose object it is, and who have the ability, to ameliorate human suffering and promote human happiness, it is then within the sphere of their sacred duties to foster and cherish and encourage societies so commendable.

When, moreover, to these hallowed aims is to be added the higher and holier one of stimulating Christian charity, then all questions of propriety merge into the question of duty ; to speak is no longer blame-worthy, for silence under the weight of such convictions would be sin.

Of the two kinds of mutual benefit societies, which do not withdraw men from their homes and families, and which are, therefore, more favourably presented to our regard, Savings' Banks and Life Assurance Companies ; I incline to prefer the

latter, because the end sought to be attained is, I think, more secure, and the means of attaining it less sordid, and, therefore, more consonant to the Christian Law.

A Life Assurance Company may be briefly stated to be a body of individuals who contribute a common fund for a common and certain purpose, in which, however, it is agreed that the first and greatest sufferer shall receive the earliest benefit. If the Company is composed of men of probity and honour, they will be guided by those rules which experience has established as the true basis of calculation, in ascertaining the mean duration of a given number of lives ; and this principle seems to demonstrate that while it is a matter of uncertainty when any individual may die, it is a fact almost within the compass of arithmetical computation, that the deaths of

a given number of individuals will be found upon comparison to conform to a fully understood and well established ratio, making it therefore a question of little difficulty to appraise the exact quota which each contributor, according to his age, should make to the common fund.

This being a fact within the reach of proof, it is no longer a question of hazard or venture for an individual to become a contributor towards the object which these Companies are established to assure. In truth, it would seem that of the various modes to which men resort of providing for their successors, there are none less liable to disappointment, nor less open to the suspicion of an uncertain equivalent, than the investment in Life Assurance.

I do not wish, however, to be understood as recommending this plan as a substitute

for the modes of accumulating property, to which men more commonly resort; but I am desirous of communicating these impressions derived alike from observation and experience, with a view of suggesting whether it is not safe and advisable for every parent to adopt to some extent the principle of Life Assurance, as a means of immediately securing those whom he most fondly loves, against the reverses and poverty which his sudden decease would bring upon them.

It is almost imperative upon those who derive their support from annual salaries or annuities to adopt the principle; and the fluctuations of trade, and the uncertainty in the value, combined with the difficulty of converting real property, make it, I think, most desirable for those who are engaged in the former, or who are in possession of

the latter, to consider its importance. It, at once, affords to the widow and children of the deceased those means of support, which, if obtained at all from other sources, are but too frequently secured by great and irretrievable sacrifices. Sorrowing survivors are often disabled by the pressure of immediate and urgent necessity from treasuring their properties till the period arrives for disposing of them without loss.

When we think, moreover, not only of the immediate, but of the remote injuries which follow from the neglect of making this provision—*injuries over which you yourselves would weep could you but foreshadow them—in your son, the inheritor of your name, uninstructed, uncared for, and early made familiar with vice,—in your daughter, whom your manhood would shelter and preserve from danger, exposed*

in her young and trustful days, with a heart full of feeling, but with a mind untaught and uninformed, in a world full of sin, obliged either to eat the bitter bread of dependence, or to earn it at the hands of rude, unfeeling, unthinking, and uncaring strangers ! Remember your boy and your girl in their orphanhood, and blame me not for having claimed the privilege which this holy day and this solemn service affords of making some practical suggestions for the benefit of widows and of orphans.

I have said that the adoption more generally of the principle of Life Assurance would have the effect of stimulating Christian charity. The uncertainty and variability of trade are often urged as reasons for withholding contributions from God's Church and God's poor. The profits of the good year, it is said, are required to

meet the losses of the bad one, till, imperceptibly at first, the practice of hoarding is acquired, the vice of acquisitiveness has succeeded the principle of prudence, and thus beguiled by the plea of providing for their families, men come to defraud God of His dues, and pile up their wealth, only to increase by their avarice the difficulty of dying, and enhance by their parsimony the terrors of eternity.

Now, it does seem obvious to me, that, if by the annual investment of a comparatively small amount, a sum certain could be realized at the death of an individual for the benefit of those most dear to him, he would be less anxious for the morrow, more inclined to do something for his generation before he falls asleep, more disposed to smooth the journey of life by scattering along its path the blessings and

graces of charity, and less hindered in his faith by the alloy and dross of "things that perish in the using." These annual payments would, I think, if we were sufficiently penetrated with the loving-kindness of our heavenly Father, wear the appearance of thank-offerings to Him who blesses us with length of days ; and the instinctive love of life which all possess, would effectually prevent the feeling of cupidity in regard to those who, by early death, may be said to withdraw, for the benefit of survivors, a larger share of the common fund.

Oh, no ! the sorrowing relatives who have been early called to bear the weight of bereavement, would not be regarded with envy by those contributors " who are alive and remain," especially by those who have felt the force of the Apostolical injunc-

tion: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

In considering the suggestions which prudence may dictate in regard to the temporal well-being of our survivors, especially of those of our own household, let us ever bear in mind the strict and solemn account which we must one day give at the judgment seat of Christ. The days of mourning for each one of us are approaching apace; the time also is coming to all of us, when the Lord shall "complete the number of His elect, and accomplish His kingdom," when He shall as surely say to each of us, as of old He said to the Widow's son, "Arise."

Oh ! brethren, to what shall we arise ? To shame and everlasting contempt, or to bliss and joy for ever ? Will the Holy Jesus deliver us, then, "to our Father

which is in heaven," as, of old, He restored the arisen son to the arms of his widowed mother upon earth ? Or, having seen our Lord, shall we be permitted only to hear the fearful words : "I never knew you, depart."

May God enable us to live as we shall wish we had done when we come to die, that so, when we rise to the "life immortal," it shall be in the blessed communion and fellowship of Him, who, with the Father and Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth ever one God, world without end.—*Amen.*

October 16th 1870

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